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8 October 2014

Ms Dawn Rapson
Headteacher
Birchwood CofE Primary School
The Mount
Admirals Road
Birchwood
Warrington
Cheshire
WA3 6QG

Dear Ms Rapson

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Birchwood CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 October 2014 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in January 2014. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Executive Director Families & Wellbeing for Warrington.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014.

- Ensure teaching is consistently good or better so that all groups of pupils make at least good progress and their attainment rises in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1 and 2 by:
 - ensuring all teaching is well-paced and captures pupils' interests and encourages them to learn, particularly the most able
 - ensuring marking improves, and best practice is shared and consistent across all subjects, especially in science and history
 - developing pupils' ability to assess the quality of their own work and to be aware what they need to do in order to take the next steps in their learning.

- Raise the achievement of all pupils in Years 1 to 6, in reading, writing and mathematics so that more attain higher standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 by:
 - ensuring that there are no significant differences between the performance of pupils from different groups, including boys and girls and that lessons are of interest to both
 - ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to read, write and use mathematical skills in other subjects
 - providing pupils with a variety of opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills to solve practical, day-to-day problems.

- Improve the impact of leadership, management and governance by:
 - ensuring that governors and the senior leadership team continually evaluate the effectiveness of the school's main action plan
 - developing the expertise of subject and key stage leaders in checking the quality of teaching and pupils' progress
 - ensuring that all adults consistently apply school policies and are insistent that pupils demonstrate the highest possible standards of behaviour, particularly in the classroom.

An external review of governance should be undertaken, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 7 October 2014.

Evidence

I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the pastoral manager, the local authority senior adviser and the vice chair of the governing body. I met with the office manager to discuss the single central record and found this to meet requirements. I spoke with a group of eight pupils from the four Key Stage 2 classes. I visited all classes and the nurture room, accompanied by you, to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning across the school. We reviewed a range of pupils' books to check progress, presentation, marking and handwriting. I looked at your review of the progress of the school, safeguarding documents, minutes from meetings of the governing body, pupil progress information and the school improvement plan.

Context

Since my last inspection you have taken up your role as the permanent headteacher of the school. Two teachers have left the school and two new teachers and a teaching assistant started in September. One teacher will take the role of special educational needs coordinator. A new member has joined the governing body, which means there are no vacancies.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You have relished the opportunity to lead the school as the new headteacher. Your enthusiasm, energy and determination to make this school good and raise pupils' outcomes steer your work and that of the governing body. You are very well supported by the deputy headteacher and together you have quickly established a senior leadership team with complementary qualities focused on moving the school forward. You have appointed a phase leader to monitor and evaluate Key Stage 2. The deputy headteacher monitors and evaluates Key Stage 1 and oversees the early years. Through the fresh eyes of these team members there is an increased incentive to achieve success and they are best placed to identify any areas which need immediate attention. Through sharing responsibilities you are in a stronger position to more strategically monitor the effectiveness of the school on its journey to success. You and the local authority officer have reviewed action plans after an analysis of end-of-year assessment results. These extend over an 18 month period and concentrate on the most significant areas which need improvement.

Roles and responsibilities of subject leaders have been reviewed so that they better match the experience and expertise of each teacher. All have received training in developing the new National Curriculum and how the school will organise assessment against age-related expectations at the end of each year in each subject. You have clarified exactly what you expect subject leaders to do and have planned time for each to carry out their role. For example, you have planned to give time to conduct lesson observations, look at pupils' work and talk to pupils, over the

coming year, to enable each teacher to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and pupils' progress.

An external review of governance is now complete and governors have an action plan to guide their improvement as a governing body. Members have completed a skills audit so they can join the most appropriate committee. Minutes of governing body meetings show that governors are rigorously holding school leaders to account for the decisions they have taken to ensure pupils' progress accelerates. A senior adviser from the local authority continues to attend this group and, through her, the local authority monitors the school every six months.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The school is a calm and inviting place; recent building work and refurbishment have raised the quality of the environment so that pupils and staff have space and good-quality resources to support learning.
- Pupils behave well in classes and around the school. This is because behaviour management guidelines are consistently used by teachers and other staff. Pupils spoken to say that behaviour is much better than last year, they all get on well together and they feel safe. They commented on the 'golden essentials' and quoted 'embrace each other's differences' as the point that helped them to appreciate all their classmates.
- Governance places high emphasis on keeping pupils safe. The systems for safeguarding pupils are exemplary.
- Governors are matched with a subject leader so that they can find out, first hand, the progress of pupils in that subject.
- There is a stable staff profile as new teachers have joined the school and existing staff have stepped up to the higher expectations. Together with the newly established senior leadership team and the strong governance, the school is in a solid position to accelerate improvement.
- Pupils' achievement is set to improve further because teachers are keen to learn and improve their practice. Training, modelling and coaching techniques continue to be used to raise the quality of teaching.
- During my tour I observed pupils working hard and showing interest and perseverance. For example, Year 5 pupils were solving problems linked to travel: they were using a budget to plan a trip for their teacher and had to calculate the cost of the flight, accommodation, entertainment and food. Pupils worked well collaboratively to make sure the cost remained in budget.
- Overall progress is getting better across the school.
- Year 2 assessments in reading, writing and mathematics show a significant rise on the 2013 figures in the number of pupils reaching the expected levels; and in reading, at the higher level. Provisional results for Year 6 show a rise at the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders and governors have overall halted the decline in pupils' achievement and

secured better rates of progress for most groups of pupils. Improvement in behaviour is enabling teachers to concentrate on planning activities which fully interest and challenge pupils, who are responding well. Nevertheless, there is still work to be done to accelerate progress so that pupils reach at least expected levels and the most able pupils reach the higher levels.

- School records show that over the last two terms pupils made better than expected progress in most classes. However, the school must be vigilant to ensure the gap between those pupils who need extra help in class, those who are disadvantaged and others starts to narrow rapidly.
- As new staff have joined the school it is vital that they receive a thorough introduction to the values and vision of senior leaders and governance, and receive opportunities for professional training so that they are equipped to carry out their roles effectively.
- The governing body is due to receive an external review with a focus on pupil premium on 11 November.

External support

The local authority has supported the school through the recruitment and appointment of the new headteacher. The local authority senior adviser attends governor meetings to provide support to the governors and to challenge senior leaders. The headteacher has used a subject leader in education from a local school to provide training in English for teachers and a consultant to provide training in mathematics. She is taking advantage of joining the local cluster of schools and forging links with a local teaching school.